



July 2010
Volume 1, Issue 1

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What is this thing called Kindergarten and is it still relevant?

Friedrich Froebel, one of the pioneers of early childhood education, intended kindergarten to be a place for children to grow. That growth does not center on simply academics. It encompasses a child's emotional, physical, intellectual, moral, and social development. In other words, kindergarten's purpose is to help develop the "whole" child.

Kindergarten is the transition from preschool, daycare or home to the primary grades.

When adults (i.e. parents, administrators, teachers in other grade levels) comment on kindergarten, you will often hear it described as a place in

which "all they do is play". And they are exactly right; kindergarten serves the needs of young children, mainly five years old who learn through play. The kindergarten classroom must then allow for children to actually play; in doing so, children are able to, for example, make choices, work individually and with others and utilize new vocabulary in a safe and supportive environment. Kindergarten is a place where children develop a love of school and learning. Therefore, it is the foundation in which future grades build upon.

*What is Kindergarten?
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10 Signs of a Good Kindergarten Classroom

The following include characteristics of a good learning environment for kindergartners:

1. **Children are playing and working with materials or other children.** They are not aimlessly wandering or forced to sit quietly for long periods of time.
2. **Children have access to various materials and activities throughout the day,** such as block building, pretend play, picture books, paints and other art materials, and table toys such as Legos, pegboards and puzzles. Children are not all doing the same thing at the same time.
3. **Teachers work with individual children,** small groups and the whole group at different times during the day.
4. **The classroom is decorated with children's artwork** and their own writing with invented spelling and dictated stories.

*10 Signs
Continued on Page 3*

The 1 - 2- 3s...of Kindergarten

1. The minimum time (hour) young children need to be involved in physical exercise a day. This includes outside play time (free play and/or directed play) and music movement within the classroom.
2. 1 (Teacher)
+1 (Full Time Assistant)
2 (The minimum number of adults needed in every Kindergarten classroom all day, everyday)
3. Goats, Bears, Pigs, Brothers anyone? Great stories always come in threes!
4. K Math Time should consist of the following cycle: Whole Group Lessons, Stations & Small Groups, Stations & Small Groups (again), Whole Group Reflection
5. Hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching . . . all of these senses are used by kinders as they explore and learn about the world around them.
6. The first six weeks of school teachers need to: get to know children and families; create a climate of warmth and safety; teach the schedule and routines of the day; motivate children to learn; introduce students to the physical environment and materials; establish expectations about ways we will become a learning community
7. The number of curriculum strands fostered in the BLOCK Center/Expressive Arts, Language Arts, Social Development, Math, Social Studies, Science, Motor

Why Play?

Play is the main way children learn and develop ideas about the world. It helps them build the skills necessary for critical thinking and leadership. It's how they learn to solve problems and to feel good about their ability to learn.

Children learn the most from play when they have skilled teachers who are well-trained in understanding how play contributes to learning.

Most child development experts agree that play is an essential part of a high quality learning program. Play is not a break from learning – it's the way young children learn.

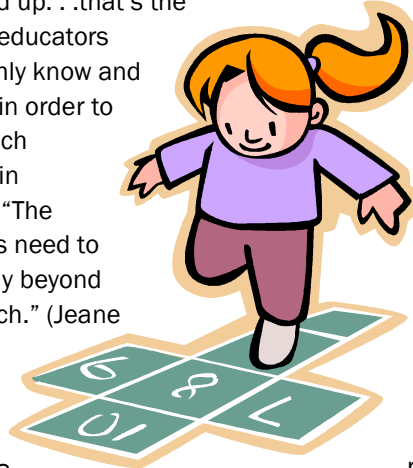
WHEN CHILDREN PLAY:

- They test their developing ideas with objects, people, and situations – the key ability for academic learning
- They develop many kinds of skills together – physical, social, emotional, thinking and language
- They are doing things they are interested in, have a natural motivation to learn
- They develop concepts, skills together
- They learn from other children and develop social skills by playing together

From www.4children.org

Development. . .who knew the BLOCK Center affects all of these domains?!!!!

8. This grade and up. . .that's the level of math educators must thoroughly know and be able to do in order to effectively teach mathematics in kindergarten. "The math teachers need to know goes way beyond what they teach." (Jeane Joyner)
9. 6 and 3; 5 and 4; 7 and 2; 1 and 8 - all part - whole relationships of *nine*; Educators *must* help students develop number sense – this goes beyond rote counting, symbols, and memorizing facts. Challenge students by having them explore the numbers (i.e.) What do we know about 9? This includes: counting to nine; counting 9



objects and understanding the last number word tells how many; writing the numeral 9; recognizing the numeral 9; more and less by 1 and 2: 9 is one more than 8, two more than 7, and two less than 11; recognizing spatial patterns; part-whole relationships; anchors to 5 and 10: 9 is 1 away from 10; other relationships: relationships to the real world – my sister is 9 years old (from Amy Scrinzi/*Developing Number Sense in K*)

10. Kinders need repetition, so as a K teacher, expect to read that special book 10 times or more throughout the school year!

Sensational Science Centers

Go for it; create a science center if you have not done so already! This is the area of the classroom where the children will learn to explore their immediate environment as well as the world around them. The science center should include science books, models of the human body, magnifying glasses, goggles, birds' nests, a classroom pet, such as a fish or hamster, telescopes, tornado tubes, and a sand and water table (please note that the sand and water table could be a separate center – the choice is yours). You can also include soil and seeds so children can grow their own plants.

From http://www.ehow.com/how_4443531_set-up-kindergarten-class.html#ixzz0tDdMA6et

Utilize Brain Breaks

When you see your students becoming antsy, have them get up and move to *Miss Mary Mack*, *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*, the *Chicken Dance*, the *Tooty Ta* (www.drjean.org), the *Hokey Pokey*, *Tony Chestnut* (<http://www.n-e-n.com/index.aspx>). . . Many of these activities get students not only up and moving, but they allow children to cross the mid-line of their body which helps both sides of their brain to engage.



Kagan's *Silly Sports and Goofy Games* <http://abllab.com/>

*Need additional ideas for setting up a science center?
Check out these links and resources:*

Internet Resources

- <http://www.kindergarten-lessons.com/kindergarten-science-center.html>
- <http://www.nsta.org/>
- <http://www.ncsta.org/>
- <http://www.aimsedu.org/>

Print Resources

- *The Complete Guide to Classroom Centers* by Linda Holliman
- *Learning Through the Eyes of a Child: A Guide to Best Teaching Practices in Early Childhood Education* Department of Public Instruction/Early Childhood Section

<http://www.responsiveclassroom.org/index.html>

10 signs

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5. **Children learn numbers and the alphabet in the context of their everyday experiences.** Exploring the natural world of plants and animals, cooking, taking attendance and serving a snack are all meaningful activities to children.
6. **Children work on projects and have long periods of time (at least one hour) to play and explore.** Filling out worksheets should not be their primary activity.
7. **Children have an opportunity to play outside every day (weather permitting).** This play is never sacrificed for more instructional time.
8. **Teachers read books to children throughout the day,** not just at group story time.
9. **Curriculum is adapted for those who are ahead as well as those who need extra help.** Children do not learn the same things at the same time in the same way.
10. **Children and their parents look forward to school.** Parents feel safe sending their child to kindergarten. Children are happy; they are not crying or regularly sick.

Individual kindergarten classrooms will vary, and curriculum will vary according to the interests and backgrounds of the children. But all developmentally appropriate kindergarten classrooms will have one thing in common: a focus on the development of the child as a whole.

From The National Association for the Education of Young Children

Make it Fun and Watch Them Learn!

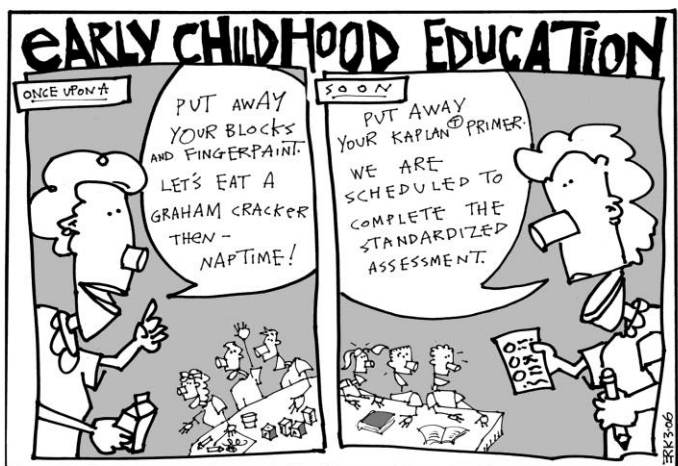
Worksheets don't grow dendrites! Children learn by being active participants. I thought you knew that! Obviously, with the push for students to know more in less time and to make sure students are ready for those "tests", many teachers, administrators and parents panic and feel the pressure or urge to have children engage in drill and kill methodology (i.e. worksheets, endless drill practices, flash cards, the whole nine yards). "Be still, be quiet,

and pay attention so that you will learn something today". Is that a guarantee or a precursor to learning? Just how do children learn? What are best practices? How can we ensure children get the most out of education? Research shows that "information is retained or imprinted on the brain at a much higher rate when the person is relaxed and enjoying the experience". When children think they are playing a game or participating in an activity,

they are naturally prone to tune in. So, when you walk into a kindergarten classroom and the children are singing songs, dancing, building with blocks – rest assured, learning *is* taking place.

Oh, but you could always sit a student in front of a workbook or have him/her quickly give the answer to your stack of flashcards.

What would you rather do?



Thought of the Day:

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.

The Role of an Educator

In the event you find yourself, as a classroom teacher, doing most of the talking rather than your students and/or you feel you are talking at them, please take a few moments and re-examine your role and purpose as a teacher.

"A good teacher explains . . . a superior teacher demonstrates . . . a great teacher inspires."

– Unknown

An educator is a life coach, cheerleader, mentor, and facilitator. Ours is to guide, inspire, motivate, model appropriate behaviors, ask thought provoking questions, direct, encourage and teach students how to think and become problem solvers. It is not our

purpose to always *tell* the answers, but to provide relevant experiences so students can find the answers on their own.

We reflect constantly on our practice - what worked and what didn't. We know our students; how they learn best; what interests them. We utilize this knowledge as we plan lessons, activities and learning experiences. We embrace our students' backgrounds - families and cultural diversities. We accept children as they are and help

nurture their growth intellectually, academically, socially, and emotionally.

We are counselors, nurturers, good listeners and advocates of developmentally appropriate practices. As educators, we must be able to articulate to others our beliefs of why we are teaching what we are teaching. Our role, if honored, will positively touch the lives of the children we encounter by first and foremost teaching them how to find the joy in lifelong learning.

TIP OF THE MONTH:

How to Set Up the BLOCK Center

- Make sure there is adequate SPACE
- LOCATION is key (make sure the block center is not located in a high traffic area)
- Have enough BLOCKS (500-750 in a variety of shapes and sizes)
- Provide accessible STORAGE and MATERIALS for multiple children to build

BEFORE (non-existent)



AFTER



Teacher Favorites

Spice up your storytelling and music time with a twist of country, rhythm and blues and more:

Check out CJ's music



<http://www.suitea.com/cj/cjtime.html>

Try This Quick and Easy Summertime Snack

Banana Berry Smoothie

Ingredients

2 bananas
2 cups strawberries
1 cup milk
1 cup yogurt (plain or your favorite flavor)

Directions:

Place ingredients in a blender and blend to desired consistency.

An adult will need to operate the blender for younger children.

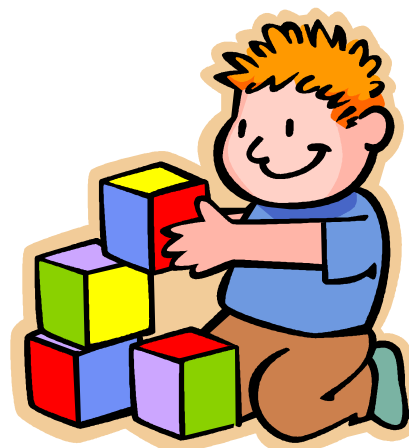
Number of servings:

2-3

Estimated time:

5-10 minutes

Courtesy of www.familyeducation.com



What is Kindergarten?

Continued from Page 1

KINDERGARTEN IS EXPERIENCING

- a year of learning that lays the foundation for life
- a year of carefully planned experiences designed to help eliminate educational deficits and establish readiness for academics
- building with blocks, dramatizing stories, cutting, pasting, and painting
- learning the letter names and talking about their sounds



KINDERGARTEN IS TIME FOR ACQUIRING THE TOOLS NECESSARY FOR READING

- to build vocabulary, to know words and to use words
- to be introduced to books, learn to use them and love them

- time for listening to stories read aloud and answering questions about the stories
- time for being exposed to written words
- time for experience stories and charts; to learn what can be said and written; and what can be written and read
- learning to write using sound spelling

KINDERGARTEN IS WRITING

- developing large muscles and fine muscles
- learning to coordinate hand muscles with eye muscles
- placing round pegs in round holes
- manipulating toys and puzzles and clay
- finger-painting, drawing, coloring, and pasting
- learning to write one's name correctly; using a capital letter for the first letter and lower

case letters for the rest of the name

KINDERGARTEN IS MATHEMATICS

- building number concepts
- getting a feel of numbers by using unifix cubes, blocks, and other materials
- comparing sizes, recognizing shapes, colors, likenesses and differences, how many and how few
- manipulating materials that give meaning to terms such as smaller and larger, over and under, and equal to
- creating and extending patterns
- estimating, collecting data, and building graphs

From

<http://www1.sdhc.k12.fl.us/~kindergarten.elementary/whatisKindergarten.htm>

Ask a KTL (Kindergarten Teacher Leader)

Do you have a question concerning Kindergarten best practices? Are you about to throw up your hands in frustration? Need some reassurance? Feel free to send in your questions, comments, etc. to the POK community.

Y. ASKS A QUESTION ON TEACHING KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN TO WRITE ON LINED PAPER

I was asked by another K teacher the following question:

Should kindergarten students be taught to write on lined paper?

My thoughts are that it is developmentally inappropriate because 4-6 year olds have not

developed the eye-hand coordination that is needed to write on lined paper.

Please send me your thoughts/ideas on this issue.

Jenn offers her expertise:

I often provide a mixture of paper for the children to choose from. One problem I find with the traditional lined paper is the size of the letters the children have to make to fill the space between the lines. It is almost

like making a letter the height of my whiteboard to me.

On the other hand, there always seems to be an abundance of lined paper at school. So, I will offer it. The children that need or want it use the lines as a guide. The children that don't need it or are not ready for the lines don't seem to notice that they are there.

*Ask a KTL
Continued on Page 7*

Ask a KTL

Continued from Page 6

I don't know what the "proper" thoughts are on this, but I do provide it and have it in the room as a choice and for variety. I don't force perfect writing on it though.

I hope that this makes some sense. I know it doesn't get an answer to you. (I will say that the first grade teachers do like seeing the lined paper. They don't seem to know they aren't really enforced, especially at this point in the year.)

A.M.'S QUESTION:

What would you do if you have a child almost removed from your classroom, with one of the suggestions being you are not the right race for this child? How do you argue on that one?

J's response:

Well, I read your post over an hour ago and have tried to ponder what I would do. First, I would find somebody that I could vent to (such

as a personal family member of mine). I would then type or write a letter while AT HOME and then delete or burn it. Hopefully, after getting rid of some of the personal feelings, I would be a little more willing to act professionally.

I think I would then request a conference with the parent/guardian and an administrator, guidance counselor, or another school person that I feel comfortable with. I would then ask them to share their thoughts and views with me on why there seems to be a problem. I would try to respond calmly and professionally. Hopefully at the end of the meeting, both sides would have an understanding of the others views and the family would realize that we as teachers see each of our children without skin color (in a racial way) and celebrate each individual that we are gifted with.

I know it is much easier to say these words than follow them, but I would hope that if put into the same situation, I would be able to pull away from the pain and insult and work it out professionally for the sake of the child.

POINTS TO PONDER (FROM THE WORDS OF DR. LILIAN KATZ, EDUCATOR EXTRAORDINAIRE):

- To be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to travel with a different view.
- The good life for our own children can only be secured if it is also secured for all other people's children.

A Covenant for Honoring Children

By Raffi (www.raffinews.com)

We find these joys to be self evident: That all children are created whole, endowed with innate intelligence, with dignity and wonder, worthy of respect. The embodiment of life, liberty and happiness, children are original blessings, here to learn their own song. Every girl and boy is entitled to love, to dream and belong to a loving "village" and to pursue a life of purpose.

We affirm our duty to nourish and nurture the young, to honor their caring ideals as the heart of being human; to recognize the early years as foundation of life, and to cherish the contribution of young children to human evolution.

We commit ourselves to peaceful ways and vow to keep from harm or neglect these, our most vulnerable citizens. As guardians of their prosperity we honor the bountiful Earth whose diversity sustains us. Thus, we pledge our love for generations to come.

Additional References/Resources:

<http://www.ncreadyschools.org/documents/1PowerofK.pdf>

www.froebelweb.org

www.parentinginformation.org/readyforkindergarten

www.naeyc.org

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/>

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Third Edition. Carol Copple and Sue Bredekamp, editors
K Today by Dominic Gullo

The Play's the Thing by Elizabeth Jones

The Block Book by Elisabeth Hirsch

Explorations with Young Children by Anne Mitchell and Judy David

Nurturing Knowledge by Susan B. Neuman, Tanya S. Wright, Kathleen Roskos, Lisa Lenhart

Many Heartfelt Thanks To:

Eva Phillips

Amy Scrinzi

Sharon Ritchie

Lucy Roberts

POK Think Tank Members

POK Guest Speakers

POK KTLs

Children across the globe

Families, Communities and Administrators:
without your support and encouragement, we
could not do what we endeavor to do

The Sawyer Family

PTM-COGIC

Teachers, past – who have laid the foundation
and set the standard;

Teachers, present – who continue to inspire and
strive for excellence;

Teachers, future – may you rise to the occasion
and raise the bar.



In Memory of Sharon Butson

James W. Smith Elementary, Craven County Schools
1951 - 2008